

Self-Opacity and Human Agency

PHILG9646, Fall 2019

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326a Milibank Hall

Office Hours:

Thursdays 2:00-4:00 and by appointment

Wednesday 12:10-2:00

Room TBD

This course is concerned with the concept of *self-opacity* which, broadly speaking, refers to a failure of ordinary self-knowledge or self-understanding. More specifically, this course will be focused on analyzing self-opacity as a *practical* phenomenon (which is not yet to say a practical *problem*); that is, as something that we human beings must navigate in the context of our lives as ethical, social, political and aesthetic beings. This means trying to philosophically understand what is involved in understanding ourselves *as* such opaque beings, that is, as beings that are at once self-conscious and self-opaque, and indeed self-opaque *only because* self-conscious. We will thus follow Jonathan Lear in exploring human reality as significantly constituted both by reflexive subjectivity *and* by a lack of awareness regarding the deeper meanings that shape and structure that subjectivity—which is to say that this opacity is not merely a contingent privation or lack; rather self-opacity *shapes* human reality as much as its reflexivity and self-consciousness. In this course we will discuss the following ideas: different kinds of self-knowledge (trivial, substantial, individual, anthropological...), first-person vs. third-person perspectives on the self, responsibility, the philosophical significance of psychoanalytic concepts, as well as philosophical methodology (that is, which philosophical approach is appropriate for the topic of self-opacity?).

We begin by reading in the contemporary literature on self-opacity in the context of philosophical accounts of agency and moral psychology, before turning to Freud.

Course Structure, Requirements, Assignments

Participation:

Regular attendance and engagement in the discussion.

Summary Notes:

Each student will be assigned one week where they are responsible for writing up a brief summary and potentially connecting the discussion with the previous discussion or the next week's readings

Final Essay(s) plus proposal:

Each student will write EITHER a final term paper of 17-20 pages OR two 10 page papers, and will submit a one-page proposal (for each).

The mid-term paper is due NOV 1. The final paper is due DEC 16.

Your proposal should contain a thesis statement along with a rough description of your proposed argument and any secondary literature that you plan to engage with. (though I recognize that much can change in the course of writing).

Books to be purchased (in order of reading)

- Quassim Cassam. *Self-Knowledge for Humans* (2015) (online at Clio)
- Nomy Arpaly *Unprincipled Virtue* (2003) (online at Clio)
- George Sher. *Who Knew? Responsibility without awareness* (2009) (online at Clio)
- Sigmund Freud. *Three Essays on Sexuality*. (**Edition:** Basic Books).

Tentative Schedule of Readings

(these may change as we get a sense of our pace)

1. September 4. **Introduction: First-Person Self-Knowledge**

- Richard Moran. "Self-Knowledge: Discovery, Resolution, and Undoing." *European Journal of Philosophy*. 5: 2. (1997).
- Akeel Bilgrami. "Self-Knowledge and Resentment." In Wright, Smith, Macdonald (eds.) *Knowing Our Own Minds*. (2000).
 - Recommended: P.F. Strawson "Freedom and Resentment."

2. September 11. **Critics, Third-Person Self-Knowledge**

- Quassim Cassam. "Substantial Self-Knowledge," "Normative Rationalism," "Knowing Yourself," "Self-Ignorance" from *Self-Knowledge for Humans* (2015).
 - Optional: Cassam. "Homo Philosophicus," "The Disparity."
 - Optional: Matthew Boyle. "Two Kinds of Self-Knowledge." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 78:1 (2009).

3. September 18. **On the relationship between first- and third-person self-knowledge**

- Amélie Rorty. "The Deceptive Self: Liars and Layers." *Analyse & Kritik*, 7:2, 1985
- Victoria McGeer. "The moral development of first-person authority." *European Journal of Philosophy*, 16 (1), 2007.
 - Optional: Robert Pippin. "Actors and Spectators." National Humanities Center 2010.

4. September 25. **Agency without awareness**

- Nomy Arpaly *Unprincipled Virtue* (2003) Ch 1, 2, 3 (Recommended 4).
 - Optional: John Doris. *Talking to Ourselves* (2015) Chapter 1.

5. October 2. **Agency without awareness**
 - George Sher. *Who Knew? Responsibility without awareness* (2009). 1-4
6. October 9. **Agency without awareness**
 - George Sher. *Who Knew? Responsibility without awareness* (2009). 5-8
 - Angela Smith, Review of Sher in *Social Theory and Practice*. 36:3 (2010)
7. October 16. **The shaping of deliberation behind our backs**
 - Paul Katsafanas. "Nietzsche and Murdoch on the Moral Significance of Perceptual Experience." *European Journal of Philosophy* 26:1 (2017)
 - Baz, Avner. "Motivational Indeterminacy." *European Journal of Philosophy*. 25:2 (2016).
8. October 23. **Cultural Ignorance.**
 - Michele Moody-Adams. "Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance." *Ethics*, 104: 2 (1994).
 - Cheshire Calhoun. "Responsibility and Reproach." *Ethics* 99 (1989).
 - Recommended. Charles Mills "White Ignorance."
 - Recommended. Linda Martín Alcoff; "Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types" both in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.) *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*.
9. October 30. **Freud**
 - Jonathan Lear. "Restlessness, Phantasy, and the Concept of Mind." *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (1999).
 - Sebastian Gardner. "Unconscious Motives and Freudian Concepts." *Irrationality and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*.
 - Recommended: Gardner, "Psychoanalytic Theory: A Historical Reconstruction." *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 86:1, 2012.

*FIRST PAPER DUE NOVEMBER 1.

10. November 6. **Freud**
 - *Three Essays on Sexuality*. (Basic Books).
 - Jonathan Lear, "What is Sex?" *Love and its Place in Nature* (1999).
11. November 13. **Freud**
 - Finish *Three Essays*
 - "Formulations Regarding the Two Principles of Mental Functioning" (1911)
 - "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" (1914)
12. November 20. **Freud**
 - "Repression" (1915)
 - "The Unconscious" (1915)
 - Gardner, "Wish."

- Recommended: Richard Wollheim “The Mind and the Mind’s Image of Itself.” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 50 (1969).

November 27. **No Class.**

13. December 4. **Freud**

- *The Ego and the Id* (1923)
- Béatrice Longuenesse, “Kant’s ‘I’ in the Moral ‘I Ought To’ and Freud’s ‘Super-Ego’” from *I, Me, Mine: Back to Kant and Back Again* (2017).

14. December 11. **Freud**

- Gardner, “Metapsychology and Psychoanalytic Personality.”
- Gardner, “Consciousness, Theory, and Epistemology.”

*FINAL PAPER DUE DEC 16